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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000468

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [KISL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: PROPHET MOHAMMED CARTOONS PROMPT CONSTRUCTIVE
TURKISH GOVERNMENT REACTION, MOSTLY PEACEFUL PROTESTS

Classified by Ambassador Ross Wilson, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Turkish public reaction to European publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed has so far consisted of generally peaceful protests and media condemnation, mostly in the pro-Islamist media. Government reaction has been moderate and constructive, with officials condemning the cartoons, while calling for restraint and nonviolence. Both FM Gul and PM Erdogan are reaching out to international colleagues in an effort to help calm the situation. Turkish police have done a good job of protecting Danish diplomatic facilities. Interfaith leaders have condemned the cartoons as well and called for calm. Though the visual images of the Istanbul protests may not play well in Europe, the AKP government's message should. End Summary.

Small, Peaceful Demonstrations

2. (U) Protest demonstrations at Danish diplomatic facilities in Turkey have been small and peaceful, with a larger and more raucous Istanbul demonstration February 5, but substantial police presence in each case. The demonstrations included:

-- On February 1 and 4, groups of 10-25 protestors gathered in front of the Danish Embassy in Ankara; one group consisting of workers from the GOT's Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet) placed black wreaths in front of the Danish and Norwegian Embassies.

-- A February 3 demonstration at Istanbul's Danish Consulate drew about 150 from the Islamist Saadet Party.

-- There were also February 3 demonstrations at Danish honorary consulates in Izmir (250 people) and Mersin (50, mostly from the Islamist Saadet Party).

-- On February 5, a crowd of several hundred, mainly nationalists, demonstrated at the Danish Consulate in Istanbul, throwing eggs and other objects. In a separate demonstration at the Danish Consulate, approximately 2,000 protestors burned a Danish flag and an effigy of Danish PM Rasmussen, but caused no damage to the consulate building.

3. (C) The Danish DCM told us February 4 that reaction in Turkey has been much calmer than in Arab countries. He described police cooperation as good -- Turkish police have generally outnumbered demonstrators two-to-one. The Danish Embassy has received faxes, e-mails and phone calls protesting the cartoons, but nothing threatening. However, the Danes decided to close the Istanbul Consulate February 6. A Danish soccer team is continuing practicing in Antalya despite the protests.

4. (U) According to media reports, similarly peaceful demonstrations have occurred throughout Turkey, including in the cities of Konya (where protestors burned the Danish flag) Diyarbakir, Van, Kocaeli, Erzurum, and Elazig.

GOT Criticizes Cartoons, Urges Calm

5. (U) GOT leaders have criticized the cartoons, while also warning Muslims not to respond with violence. PM Erdogan told reporters on February 5 that he had warned the Danish PM months ago that the cartoons would stir conflict, but at the same time, urged calm. "You must not let certain groups act under the justification of freedom of expression," Erdogan said. "We love and respect the prophets of other major religions. We will not tolerate any disrespect or attack on Jesus Christ or Moses. No one should be free to attack Mohammed." Erdogan stated that the problem should be addressed through diplomacy. "There cannot be a solution with weapons or guns. This is what the opponents of the Alliance of Civilizations want."

6. (U) As a further response, Erdogan and Spanish PM Zapatero published a joint "Call for Respect and Calm" in the February 5 edition of the International Herald Tribune. Noting that their countries are collaborating in the Alliance of

Civilizations Project, the two leaders stated their support for both freedom of speech and respect for religious beliefs. "Freedom of Expression is one of the cornerstones of our democratic systems and we shall never relinquish it," the PMs stated. "But there are no rights without responsibility and respect for different sensibilities. The publication of these caricatures may be perfectly legal, but it is not indifferent and thus ought to be rejected from a moral and political standpoint."

17. (U) FM Gul, for his part, reportedly met with MFA officials at his residence February 5 to discuss what could be done to prevent a further escalation of the crisis. One possibility is to create a forum at which Islamic and European countries can discuss the issue. Gul, according to the press, phoned OIC President Ihsanoglu and conveyed this proposal to him as well.

Religious Affairs Officials Take Same Line

18. (C) After the February 1 and 4 protests by Diyanet workers, the Danish ambassador contacted the MFA and expressed hope the Diyanet would not sponsor any anti-Denmark actions. FM Gul called State Minister Aydin, who oversees the Diyanet, to make certain the Friday February 3 sermon would not mention the cartoon controversy (the Diyanet writes all Friday sermons); it did not. In addition:

-- The Diyanet issued a February 3 statement expressing "sorrow" over publication of the cartoons, calling for respect for all religions as a vital part of freedom of worship, and asking that Muslims all over the world refrain from violence and keep reactions "within reasonable and legitimate limits."

-- In a television interview the same day, Diyanet President Bardakoglu called for respect for religion, termed the cartoons "regrettable," condemned their publication, but added that the Islamic world should react "within a reasonable framework, without resorting to violence or radicalism."

Interfaith Support

19. (U) Condemnation of the cartoons coupled with calls for calm have also come from an interfaith group in Istanbul. The press reported February 3 that an interfaith group consisting of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Armenian Patriarch, Istanbul's Syriac Metropolitan, Catholic Conference representative Georges Marovich and the head of the Commission for Dialogue Among Religions, Yusuf Sag, had signed a statement condemning the publication of the cartoons. Bartholomew told the Turkish press at the Istanbul airport that he hoped these "ugly things" would stop. He underscored the importance of living together in brotherhood and respect for other religions without incitement. All groups have a right to expect this, he stated.

110. (C) Comment: Danish flags have been burned in Turkey and the controversy has dominated the media. The crowds, however, have been relatively small, and law enforcement has been both very present and effective, allowing people to express their views without damage to property or persons - the mark of a culture accustomed to both controversy and a substantial measure of democracy. The pro-Islam AKP government has reacted with statesmanship, condemning the caricatures and, at the same time, reaching out to European and Islamic colleagues in an effort to forestall an escalation of the crisis. The fact that the PM and the FM are both personally pious may not resonate outside of Turkey, but likely will have an impact here. The images of the Istanbul protests will not play well in Europe, but the reality is that the GOT is trying to exert leadership, exercise diplomacy and prevent further conflagration, at home and abroad. End Comment.
WILSON